

## Qualities of Temperament

According to Thomas Chess and Birch (1970), there are nine qualities of temperament that influence an infant's response to the caregiving environment. Specific combinations of these qualities characterize infants as being:

Easy infant	Slow to warm infant	Difficult infant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Predictable eating, sleeping, and elimination patterns</li> <li>Adapts quickly to changes in routine</li> <li>Pleasant moods</li> <li>Mild reactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low to moderate activity levels</li> <li>Varies in regularity of physical needs</li> <li>Initially withdraw from unfamiliar</li> <li>Needs gentle prompting to respond to changes in routine</li> <li>Accepts changes slowly</li> <li>Slightly unpleasant mood</li> <li>Mild reactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irregular physical needs</li> <li>Slowly accepts the new or unfamiliar</li> <li>Unpleasant moods</li> <li>Intense reactions</li> </ul>

*Temperaments of caregivers and service providers might affect the way they work with infants with disabilities. They may need to modify their natural styles to promote pleasurable interactions. Goal: To achieve a good fit!*

## Nine Qualities of Temperament

1. **Activity Level or Amount of Activity:** Infants with high activity levels enjoy movement, dislike being still or contained. Infants with low activity levels cooperate with caregivers, prefer quiet play, and no roughhousing.

Active toddlers require greater supervision than toddlers with low activity levels. Reduced sensory stimulation tends to increase passivity in a passive child, though they may crave touch, vigorous movement and enjoy physical play.

2. **Rhythmicity or Regularity of Physical Needs:** Eating, sleeping and toileting needs are predictable or it is difficult to establish meal time/bed time/toileting routine.

Consistent routines may help child develop more predictable patterns.

3. **Distractibility from Ongoing Activity:** Infant easily distracted tends to be more easily soothed. If the infant is not easily distracted, the child tends not to be easily comforted.

Discovering ways to comfort is crucial and a calm controlled environment that provides carefully structured sensory input allows the child to focus on one sensory modality at a time.

4. **Approach or Withdrawal Response:** Infants with a positive approach response are willing to taste new foods and play with unfamiliar toys. Infants with withdrawal response tend to reject unfamiliar foods and toys.

These children need gentle introductions to new people, things and activities.

5. **Adaptability to Changes in the Routine or Environment:** The infant may quickly accept changes in routines or does not accept changes in routine.

Familiar objects can provide information on changes in routine (i.e. a spoon can be used to indicate mealtime).

6. **Attention Span and Persistence in an Activity:** The infant may have a long attention span and persist in an activity over an extended period of time while not being easily distracted, or have a short attention span and is distractibility which may require some frequent and brief interaction/activities.

Some persistence in self-stimulatory behaviors may require intervention and encouragement to interact and discover other things and activities to enjoy.

7. **Intensity of Reaction:** The infant may have intense reactions (laughing, crying, screaming heartily to everyday and unusual situations) or mild reactions (subdued, infrequent fussing).

Strong negative reactions may be a problem for caregivers.

8. **Threshold of Responsiveness to Stimulation:** The infant may have low thresholds of responsiveness or be extremely sensitive to mild stimulation of their senses.

9. **Quality of Mood or General Disposition:** Positive mood-pleasant (attracts interaction) or negative mood (fussy, demanding, difficulty to interact with).

Caregivers/environment needs to be responsive to the child's needs, thus reducing fussiness.

